THE

BY

Graham McGeorge

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The Arbitrary Crows

It's cold again. The icy winds
toss ice encrusted branches
every witch way

Crows lay in the trees,
crouched and crowded
into small windless nooks.

They call to each other, but
do not move. Face into the wind.

The Sting

This is the time of searching
Wasps
Of crickets, cicadas,
Grasshoppers and tree creepers
To sing in broad daylight
To hover at our eyes
Our sugar hands
Our moistened mouths
Seeking life, seeking longevity
To overcome the cycle of the seasons
The wall of the impending winter
That will freeze them where they lay
Frost dumb and slow
Do not hate them, do not fear them
We are alike, when our winter comes
Not the Winter of old age
Still so full of Life
But the last day of the last winter
When frost dumb we succumb

The Banishment

Night reigns: a beautiful queen opening to me. I stand in this conglomeration of celestial delights. Great stars stretch innumerable: left, right, all around above me. Bright points of brilliant white, blue, red, green glitter, enthrall; tease my eyes, draw out my yearning. My arms rise, wanting to fly, to whirl me up into this giddy brilliant vortex.

I stride dizzily into a fallow field from my parked car, inhaling deep, the heavy night air. Dew runs wet from thick sweet clover soaking pant legs and cooling thighs. Frogs croak wildly in the swimming grasses. Crickets and cicadas, insistent and shrill, shriek in rising tumultuous waves.

This heady silent night roars through me; my attentions compelled more intensely than any urban street. Pant legs drenching down with dew, I move in sodden shoes.

Crackling noise. I spin and crouch. Sound behind me, I listen stock still. My eyes strain into undulating darkness. Heart beats, blood pounding into my ears. An animal maybe. A beast harmless by day, but monster at night, disturbed by my stumbling presence, waiting for me now here in the blackness. The wild cacophony of the night creatures has ceased. Seconds slip by. I take a breath. My cramping knees cry out.

I see nothing but the night. No noise now except my shallow breath. My knees whine again. I adjust my position. Plant stems crackle underfoot.

"Oh!" aloud, and laugh away the tension in my nerves. Nerves that form wild beasts ready to pounce, to oust me from this starry paradise. Nerves that crackle like plant stems breaking. Foolish mortal fear.

I stare further into the field. Then stepping in that direction I trip stiff-legged and fall like a drowning man, into wet thick clover soaking with cold dew.

"Jesus Christ!" I yell, a cry not a curse. Sopping clover adheres to me, pulls then grabs at me. I thrash about for long seconds as a deep sweet aroma from these crushed and grasping plants washes over me.

A resigned calm suddenly invades. I relax. My breathing slows, face in the sweet clover flowers. I inhale long deep draughts into my lungs. I am alright. My clutching fingers release. I begin moving with purpose.

Finally standing, I look long and deep into the brilliant night sky, throwing my arms out to shake away the cold wet clothing clinging to my skin. Even more cold now, even more wet, I

turn quickly, half-running half-stumbling, the eighty odd feet like eighty odd years, away from my dark little sojourn, back to my car.

As I gain the shoulder of the road, the great orchestration of the night begins once more. Cicadas hiss and mutter. I realize their disturbedness. I listen to their wistful symphony rising, rising, rising up in me.

My hand now on the cold door handle, I take a last wishful look into the million eyes of this Queen whose song has swept into my heart. In moments I am driving back to my concrete casket in the City of Humanity.

Memorial Tour of a Kitchener-Waterloo Cemetery

A walking tour through the Graveyard. A cemetery old and majestic, full of grand monuments carrying the names of dead forebears.

Here lies John Swain. And there Hermann Erb, loving wife Silvie, together interred.

Oh see that magnificent stone. Its sectioned plot in dedicated memory to the Seagram family here at the top of Whiskey Hill looking down into the Vale. Into the City of Dead Neighbours, all laying at rest in avenues, courts and blocks.

And there by the Chapel, that set of fifty or more identical small grey slabs. Each one a brother of the Church and buried there beside his Brother in Service. A long line that spans the years and for their total sacrifice they are laid sardine-like among their kind; a march of faceless nameless history.

So further into this granite-garnished park, among this Art of Death, we stumble into the sunlight, upon the Dark family plot. John Dark, died alone and dead on his death-bed in the family death stead.

And here a kin, unborn son William. Untenanted grave covered with long green grass, a small grey-brown sandstone slab: "He lives, he dies." The dates unincised.

The Last Car Ride

Black ice
Black ice skidding
Skidding scattering sand on the road
Such a surface measures tires
These tires tire
Their spikes spike
Against the method described above

Black ice
Black ice skidding
Scattering skidding sand on the road
Such a surface measures, tires tire
These tires spike
Their spikes spire
Cross methods described as above
Over the black ice, straight up
Long enough to know the trip

Awake in The Men's Mission

Tonight smiling Pastor Ian arrives with two black ladies and another black man to conduct a service in the sparsely attended chapel after our supper. Rotund Sister Lily seats herself on the piano bench, setting sheet music in front of her. Thin Sister Jewel-Anna sits down in the front row of the congregation, clasping some hymn books tightly to her chest and Brother John finds a seat in the middle of the congregation clutching several hymn books himself. Pastor Ian steps carefully onto the dais and begins moving the lectern to a more suitable position, nodding a pleasant smile in our direction.

Currently the mission is home and a wet dreary evening has led me to think a church service indoors might not hurt. Some dozen poor, rather rough looking white men comprise the congregation.

"Brother John, pass round the hymn books and we'll get started with a couple of songs," asserts the Pastor, rubbing his hands together as if cool.

Books are passed. Brother John announces the hymn as number Two- sixty-three. Bird-like Sister Jewel-Anna has turned in her seat and stares openly at each of us, her eyes going from one man to another. I glance away when her eyes come to me. Brother John begins singing and we chime in struggling halfheartedly until the song gains our attention and slowly warms our frozen voices.

A skinny young white guy walks in with a red electric guitar, oddly flicking his head from side to side and glancing psychotically behind himself two three times as he moves across the front of the room. He sets his gear by the stage apparently intending to play alongside large Sister Lily. She sits without any motion, comfortable on her piano bench. He smiles. She smiles back.

He ignores us, shifting his equipment about; an amplifier, a wah-wah pedal and other items around himself. All seems well. Of course we recognize him as a fellow denizen and I at least am mildly surprised at his seeming connection to these gracious folks, who have come to enlighten and improve our lives. I decide this is a side of him I am simply not familiar with though I question what he can really add to the message I am expecting from them. That is all.

We continue our fitful singing. He starts noisily plinking at his shiny red electric. "Sound a "D" wouldja," he loudly asks rotund Sister Lily without looking at her. He makes loud chit chat with her in the musical pauses of our singing and she tries to attend to him, smile at us, and play simultaneously.

Is this disruptive behaviour from a rude person? No. This must be musical genius. Right. This is a gig. He, a great rock electric guitarist about to embark on an innovative black gospel thing! "Like I mean-look at Jim Morrison!" says he. Our singing stops. Pastor Ian's hands grasp the sides of the lectern -"Brothers and Sisters" smiling at the sisters. Our guitarist prattles on, plinking and plucking at the same time. "Sound that D again," he says, "I couldn't hear it." He turns to the pastor, eyes narrowed-finger stabbing- "He was talking!"

The room is dead silent but for our squirming. The pastor looks at the youngish man curiously. The fellow seems oblivious to his own boorishness, his insinuating, insulting actions. Surprisingly unperturbed Pastor Ian asks "What's your name?" "Keith!" the fellow announces, "and I can't tune without a clear sound check." We homeless watch in wonderment at our roommates nerve. We so lamb-like and good. The wheels turn in the pastor's mind, driving him into the larger dilemma as he sees it. He smiles wanly at Keith.

A mission staff loses his composure and declares firmly from where he sits: "Keith -set the guitar aside now and listen to the sermon." The oversized staff nods curtly at the pastor's expressionless face, as if situation handled. Keith ignores all this. He plucks a few strings. The corpulent white staff now rises out of his chair and repeats himself with more volume, standing resolutely with arms crossed over his chest.

Big Sister Lily suddenly whips defiantly around on her bench and loudly orders the whole room to "Let him tune!" Big staff sits, arms still crossed, a long sigh deflating his chest causing him to sag forward in his chair, eyes staring into the carpet, head shaking slowly from side to side.

The large pianist now leans forward and motions Keith gently toward her piano. Keith advances. They confer in low tones. All eyes are on them. A few notes sound. The piano. The guitar. The piano. Guitar- Silence. Nods of agreement. Silence. Both Keith and the pianist look calmly to the pastor. They are ready. Tight chests relax and we all breathe easily. Pastor Ian begins again. His smile is ear to ear as he launches into his program. Clearly he is pleased with Sister Lily, this happy resolution.

The pastor's voice is deep. He is eloquent. His arms are flung outstretched. His arms gather us to him. His clean hands flutter, settling on his chest like a pair of mourning doves. His palms fold together and he calls us to pray with him. Discordant Keith is forgotten. I glance behind me at the staff, while bowing my head. He returns the glance, smiling wryly, shaking his head in disbelief. We pray amen.

The service now begins in earnest. Pastor Ian guides us through another hymn selection. His singing is hearty. His enthusiasm inspiring. We finish one and jump to another. Slender Sister Jewel-Anna begins improvising, crying out "Praise the Lord" and "Thank you Jesus" at harmonic pauses in her rich soprano. Brother John counterpoints with an equally rich but deeper tenor. The room buzzes.

The hymn finishes. I feel a hunger in the room for more. A bead of sweat runs down the pastor's glistening forehead. "What other ones do you like?" he asks. Someone calls out a title. "Oh that's a good one!" say the sisters in unison. The pianist strikes her keys with gusto. We catapult again into song.

Something odd starts to happen. Thin Sister Jewel-Anna, surprisingly the loudest, begins enunciating words in stilted groupings of two and pause, two and pause. The pianist plays to this cadence. Our ragged group suddenly unites as we pick up the infectious rhythm. When we finish

this time, energy and excitement infuse the whole room. People are smiling at each other, the two black women are crying out "Praise Jesus, Praise Jesus!" Several more homeless men emerge from the dark bowels of the T.V. room and the stuffy library, joining our growing extravaganza in the chapel.

Another hymn, the new cadence, ecstatic phrases of "Praise God" and "Love Jesus" punctuate what has become a hypnotic soundscape, enveloping and entrancing. "Love the Lord," and "Praise Jesus," and "Amen" -these phrases now fitting perfectly in every verse, every line we sing as if written that very way.

Someone selects "Amazing Grace." Pastor Ian and all of his assistants exclaim that it is "really amazing and incredible." I almost laugh, feeling quite giddy at our exuberance. We sing it through. Keith seems really to like it, announces he cannot follow the notes in the book but "Can we sing it again?" Pastor Ian checks his watch notes he has still to deliver "the Word." His assistants nod and all of us smiling hugely, plunge again into Amazing Grace. Our final chorus is an exhilarating repetition of "Praise God" to the chorus melody. Everything is alive, almost on fire with excitement.

Eyes bright, our attention fixes on the pastor. He opens his sermon proper. He speaks to us of first and early appearances of fear, shame, guilt and anger. He confides how he had once been "a homeless man." How once "life had seemed so terrible to him." "How Fear, Shame, Anger and Guilt had ruled" his heart until the Great Day he let the Lord in! His eyes clear and bright, he looks earnestly, deeply into each of our faces.

He asks us point blank; "Have you had Fear, Shame, Anger and Guilt in your heart?" His companions signal agreement with outbursts of "Amen" and "Praise God!" In no time at all we are raising our own hands too. His eyes seem to see right into us. His eyes peer right into me. They see the shame there, the hurt , the anger inside. They see my broken feelings, my broken thinking, my broken self. My hand is up. My hand is up, and my head is pumping in agreement. "Yes, Yes," is more than a murmur in the room.

He calls us, gesturing with his clean hands, to the front. We are propelled and compelled to the step-high stage. My eyes receive reassurance from his as he nods and assembles us in front of him. He begins praying aloud, talking to God about these men, us men, me, standing there with him. He begins laying his hands on us, touching shoulders, heads. He calls for strength, for healing, for the end of shame, the end of anger. The end of guilt and fear. He calls for the love of God and the love of self to flow into us.

I want him to touch me. To put his hand upon my head. I can feel my fear, my shame but want him to put his hand on my head anyway. Take away my pain. Take away my shame. Make my life right. He tells us it is not him but God-Jesus coming through his own self now, here that can save us, will save us, will save me.

Now his hand is on my bowed head. He is praying aloud. I repeat his words as he tells them to me. I feel intensely expectant. Sudden disorientation. I step forward out of the line,

wondering if I am about to let go, burst out crying right there. I hear him tell the fellow next to me, "Do not be afraid. Do not worry. This is God's way." I turn and look at the man. He is staring at me. Surprise, shock and wonder rippling over his face. I am confused, doubtful. I can only stand blinking dumbfounded at him. I realize I do not care if he stares. His staring is irrelevant. This is me. This is mine, this moment. This is my life, my time. "Am I crying?" I ask myself, still unable to know if I am or not.

Pastor Ian promises us that in days and weeks to come so too will change. We will see it. All of us, even if we feel nothing now. He tells us the use of broken feelings and old ways of judging will not let us feel the subtle changes now. We should let the spirit of the Lord work in us. Soon enough we will see. He dismisses each of us, one by one, back to our chairs.

As I sit I realize how I truly wanted this experience. I wanted to know this experience from the inside; to be saved. I wanted to be saved. Yes! Save me! The brief moment when I thought I was crying? I am still not certain. Why would I cry? I don't think I did, but what was the man next to me reacting to? Running my hand over my cheeks feeling for wet tears, I find only oily sweat. I wanted to cry. Or maybe I was only afraid I would cry. I can't for the life of me remember exactly now what went on up there and can it be even five minutes ago?. Why did I care what the other guy thought? Or anyone. This was truly truly mine and mine alone. I feel like I cried, a sort of relief, and also a strange confusion, a disjointedness. What I was feeling or thinking before I went up seems like a thousand years ago now. I cannot really recall what had gone on before being up there.

Within minutes the service is declared over and the room empties. I speak to no one and go to bed exhausted. As I drift into sleep I reflect on this evenings' events. I had some type of experience, that's certain. Was it brainwashing? Was I saved? Am I now saved? Oh well. Time will tell. I am in bed, it's 11 pm, that's lights out around here. I at least am certain of that and where I am now. Oh, and Praise God! Praise God anyway.

The History

Descending into the dark void, where the steps are slow like mud slides in the rocky climbs. The rocky climes of Dante's descent. All the dead souls calling out to us-we loved you but are gone, only memories or presences just outside the reaches of our senses.

Trembling winds whine ghosts of centuries into our heads resonating in images kept in books of mankind . . . nothing replaces the experience of living in a Jimi Hendrix universe.

I am imposing a frosting on the cake, as people sit in the French noire movie cafe. Sedate and sophisticated, their napkins folded remembering the love for dead fish and the anal humours on their plates. Out of faeces great biological units grow into beanstalk farts that float into the heavens above the clouds.

Don't think about it. Go for the ride in the machine gun rockets landing on Mars. Where are the martians? Ploughing their fields, eating their calves, having babies and living like human beings said they would. A red sky. A blue mountain. A black night. Yellow sun, red dirt. What's the difference?

On the surface, the dust fish swim and the entrails in the sands of time arch across new terrain. There is a sand goblin swallowing sound. There is a herd of these creatures, spilling martian milk out of their pseudo-udders. Ready for eating, the martian farmers rope and tie them down, heaving heavy furred bodies onto the red sand, riding ostrich-shaped horse creatures like wild men, over the dusty gorges and over the rolling sand dunes. Their saddle bags and travois filled with white martian milker meat.

We watched them, reading the history of the shrinking sun as they fled the planet and flew finally to earth and left their ancient beginnings behind, to cower and cover in the freezing dusts and winds of a now cold and lifeless planet.

The rise of a new organism, thought new, pounding in troops, Roman deep and fierce over the duration of historical generation, becoming human, forgetting all that incredible history, now mere genetic configurations that are excess and useless and unexpressed.

Swords cross shields and their leather sandals raise the dust for miles as columns march, reinventing a new world where the biomass is configured by different gravitational forces, different realizations of gold and treasure and want and desire. This clock is atomic molecular time wendlessly winding forward.

The workings of the high earth, buried deep within her, where the odious heat bellows and the makers pound and beat burning hot metals and substances into incredible copper and brass and steel glass high art, high columns remembering some previous life, imagining now for mankind this huge new world filled with lakes of fire and blood and murder of the flesh rising into a black but well-lit night and harnessing the moon to mirror a deadly glow over the leftover

memories, now locked in vaults deep inside characteristic genes that are the tiny fragment of that universal technology making the dead sea scrolls appear as what they are-the play of primitive fools. Hear, hear!

The new crystals, sent whirling in the ether and smashing into each other, all akimbo, there a dog, there a frog, a dinosaur, a new planet, another sun. A whole history of city after city and a new white savior lost in the particularities of the ant hill. What can be done? What can be seen? What future do we envision as the Universal strings of light beam proton fields coagulate in vibrating lines and the very voice of God calls out to the screaming creatures, whose cries are swallowed in the shrieks and frantic screams of their high pitched fellows; the elephants, the pterodactyls, the ancient grizzlies and ground sloths, creatures never seen, swallowed in the vortex of changing histories, all manner of configuration that could walk and run and fly, swallowed in the forces of the mindless and eternal laser, micro-atomic, molecular magnetics of this instantiation.

So the journey deep into the past, into the time of no time, before time, in this void we only know as Eternity. Only glimpse in our ideas-deny we could really ever know. There is no thinking here.

There is only the laying on of hands, the laying on of the floor, the bed, the couch and letting the deep silence of nothing fill us. Feeling it without judging it and lo and behold the sculpture of perception begins to take shape and we see-Lord God we see. Allah, Buddha, Jehovah-we see these Greek columns, carved in the Great Rock of Heaven, vibrating in the Mountains of Nirvana, dancing columns that hold the very firmament in place, but not still, not at rest, never.

Here then, deep within that Racial memory in the atomic living crystal molecular structures of Ancient protoplasm and the lightning energies exploded on what became ourselves, this Frankensteinian monster called "Our Time" called "This Life" so wild in diversity. Relax on the table as the current flows through you. Remember your Amoebic birth, remember your world on the day of your reckoning when you were ejected from the rock and spit down the steep valley wall, a mass, alive, electrified and swept into the river of raging antediluvian black water and became a fish in your own existence.

Oh God, remember yourself once again and become the master again. The fish, the hook, the fisher. Bring yourself to the shore of yourself. Land on the sunny sand of the shore calm beach and drag yourself up the beach, breathing in the fresh clean air that is the remembrance of your own history in the only words you can truly know-the words of the living experience itself. A sunny day, a wild storm, they themselves are the words. No thing else intervenes in your knowledge. All of it all at once-known now as you gasp the air that is you, on the beach that is you, in the sun that is you and hear the music of the seabirds that is you and your song and the realization of this great perfection again, in the hand that clutches this wet beach sand-alive again, as if you did not remember.

A Monologue for my Professor Friend, since I am Not a Poet

On the frontier violence rages. The violence in Mankind, pushing and hacking at natural disorder. Holding the plenum of evil and nothingness at bay.

While inside -deep deep inside- fine art, fine literature, great sciences flourish and grow in the space cleared for them by the violent, by the killer.

The bulldozers and tanks blast and blow and clear the grounds, extending the borders of human awareness. Leaving in their blood stinking ravage, smooth institutes of learning and science, great halls of art, awe-encompassing towers to finance and business.

Down here in the cement valleys, on this hallowed pavement lay the street artists, stinking, puking and malnourished. In their loud black colors, lewd yellow voices, making twisted cripples of themselves by chopping off the bony hand that feeds them. The hand of force, hand of subjection, capacity for destruction.

Yes, yes, peace in your circle while on the border men die. Whole countries are swallowed and you thinking it was because now, you had a University degree and wrote a book. All the while you were laughing at the one who smelled and talked funny, thinking you made the world.

But let us not mistake the compromise. The deferment of the sub-humans to you, is revulsion at your arrogance. Not an honor, not an honor at all.

Perhaps you should try smoking pot. Perhaps you should try a walk on the street for a few years, really taste a bit of poverty. Take a real look at your self then, from the beggar's side of the desk.

Maybe if you stepped out of your parent's shiny eyes and stood on the street inhaling the stench of humanity and yourself, maybe then you could write a real poem.

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